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ABSTRACT

A systematic analysis of dissertation research on stress in educational administration, using a sample of 44 dissertations completed from 1969 to 1982, inventoried these studies' topics, evaluated their conception, design, and methodology, and synthesized their findings. It was found that the bulk of the dissertation literature has focused on the causes of stress, and while a few recent studies have examined coping strategies, other themes have been largely neglected; it was also found that principals have been much more frequently studied than other administrators. The vast majority of the dissertations were correlational studies gathering data through mail surveys; convenience samples were the rule, and most studies chose the most readily available instrument, not the most appropriate one. Although a number of significant findings can be listed, the dissertation literature has not translated these into theory. Researchers should deemphasize variables shown to be unproductive, and adopt more varied research design and more sophisticated techniques. More fundamentally, however, they must develop a common language and a more practical perspective that draws on organizational theory; their work should emphasize responses to stress. Such research will contribute to the theory of both administration and stress. (MCG)

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STRESS AND THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: A SYNTHESIS OF DISSERTATION RESEARCH

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Paper presented to:

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STRESS AND THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATOR: A SYNTHESIS OF DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Introduction

Stress research has been a prominent concern of psychological, social science and managerial researchers. Though the medical literature began to verify the existence of physiological symptoms of stress as early as 1956 (Selye, 1956), the psychosociological researchers didn't begin to pursue the sources and causes of stress until almost ten years later. In 1964 a major national study was undertaken by social science researchers to investigate organizational stress (kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). In the last decade the concern has grown, especially in the area of human services (Sarason, 1977). "To the extent that people in the human services feel bureaucratized, victimized or with no control over the government forces that effect them, they will experience stress" (Sarason, Note 1). It is difficult to pick up a magazine, newspaper or current conference program without noting some article or workshop on stress. Part of the elusiveness in defining the concept of stress is rooted in the varied connotations of the word from cocktail parties and stress management seminars; stress is a word about which everyone seems to know something, while scientists struggle to capture the elusive definition. The subject has become so popular now that it is often referred to as "stressology" (Selye, 1980, p.viii). This concern with stress in organizations, and

society in general, will no doubt result in a continuation of the great quantities of research on stress. Educational systems are one of societies largest human service endeavors. Researchers in the field of educational administration have expressed their own concerns with stress as it impinges upon administrators, staff, and the school organization as a whole.

Objectives

To help provide optimal results for addressing significant issues, mapping of the direction of future research is often undertaken. The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze stress research in the field of educational administration to identify the themes which have been treated, determine the quality of the research and integrate the findings of this research. A major objective of this methodical synthesis is to direct the formulation of a paradigm for future research efforts. At a time when world-wide communication and publication systems have made the most recent and on-going research available quickly and efficiently at the touch of a computer key, it becomes the responsibility of the researcher to best utilize that accessibility of information retrieval. The synthesis of the flood of publications in the field of stress research becomes necessary for the most productive and economic use of time and resources.

The importance of integrative reviews has only begun to be appreciated and supported; methods of integration have

begun to be developed. By evaluating and synthesizing the research on stress this study contributes to the general knowledge of stress research in related disciplines as well as in the field of educational administration. Stress research has been in its infancy; for researchers in the area of stress, with identified trends in the research, the gaps become clear and appropriate designs for researching those gaps become evident.

This synthesis utilizes dissertation research for two reasons: (1) a majority of the research of the field exists in the dissertation; and (2) dissertation literature provides relatively complete data and therefore avoids some of the threat to the validity of integration caused by incomplete reporting by primary researchers.

Methods

Sample

The major unit of analysis for this study was doctoral dissertations on stress in educational administration completed through September of 1982. The major strategy utilized in locating these studies was a computer search of Dissertation Abstracts International entitled Comprehensive Dissertation Query Service performed by University Microfilms International. A manual search of Dissertation Abstracts International and Psychological Abstracts was completed to be certain no appropriate dissertations had been overlooked. The final sample, which represents a population of all available dissertations through September, 1982, consists of 44 studies.

Procedure

A content analysis was performed on the current social science, managerial and education literature. The content analysis provided an inventory of research themes present in the general literature. This inventory provided a basis of comparison for the content analysis of dissertation literature which followed.

The quality of the dissertation research was evaluated by the use of an instrument developed from a model elaborated by Borg & Gall (1979) and Shakeshaft (1980). Application of this 110 point instrument investigated aspects of the presentation of the problem, review of the literature, quality of the sampling plan, internal and external validity of the primary research, appropriateness of the statistical analysis, and presence or absence of methodological errors. Finally, relationships were sought between characteristics of the studies, themes examined, and quality of the dissertations.

The final aspect of the study integrated the findings of the dissertation research using the synthesizing strategies of listing the factors, taking a vote, and averaging the statistics. The findings were integrated within four themes: (1) measurement; (2) causes of stress; (3) coping strategies; and (4) impact on health. A separate section integrated the results related to demographic variables across themes. Finally, consistent trends in the research were identified within each theme, and specific suggestions were provided for future research directions and methodological improvements in

stress research in the field.

Methods of Integration

Before presenting the results of the study, some discussion of the methods of integration and validity issues considered would be helpful to the reader.

An analysis of all the available methods of research integration makes it apparent that what is necessary for the 'best' synthesis is a combination of the best characteristics of qualitative and quantitative techniques. Cook and Leviton (1980) believe that all literature reviews share both qualitative judgements and quantitative techniques. Quantitative research presupposes qualitative judgements about relevant studies, constructs to be investigated, criteria of examining methodological differences, and inferences of varying results. Qualitative reviews require some quantitative processes such as tallies, counts or averages. Though Leviton and Cook (1981) are supporters of meta-analysis, they take issue with the assertion of Cooper and Arkin (1981) that increased quantification will necessarily improve the inferences made in literature reviews (p. 234). Only recently has it been suggested that quantitative data synthesis procedures in general, should be examined for sources of invalidity as rigorously as is the process of generating primary research (Stock, Okun, Having, Miller, Kinney, & Ceurvorst, 1982, p. 10).

These validity issues have been considered in this synthesis. To protect the validity of the problem formulation of this review, broad conceptual definitions were used and

the integration was exhaustive in attention to distinctions in study procedures. In efforts to protect the validity of the data collection for this study, the total population of the dissertation literature on stress in educational administration has been examined. Details as to sources, keywords, dates and specific procedures can be obtained from the original data. To guard against bias in data evaluation, the Quality Instrument used to evaluate studies was designed prior to familiarity with any of the primary research. A log was kept during the entire process of evaluation so that various criteria judgements which, of necessity, had to be made, could be consistent. In the analysis and interpretation stage every effort was made to insure that review-based evidence was not used to infer causality (Cooper, 1982, p. 299). In instances where varying results are found, characteristics of the studies were examined to detect their influence on results.

If any evidence has been omitted which might be considered significant to other researchers, this was not with the intent to bias outcomes.

Upon consideration of these validity issues and quantitative and qualitative techniques, the conclusion must be that the best approach to integration will be a combination of the most appropriate methods.

> It is not uniformity in research reviewing and integrating that is desirable, rather it is clarity, explicitness and openness - those properties that are characteristic of the scientific method more generally and which impart to inquiry its "objectivity" and trustworthiness. (Glass, 1981, p. 20)

These were the guidelines of this study; a careful use of quantitative reviewing techniques in conjunction with qualitative analyses.

Results

Profile of the Dissertations

Examination of the specific research themes over time presented in Table I indicates that causes of stress have dictated the bulk of the focus of research. Though measurement of stress was the pioneering effort, the dissertations have not focused on measurement as a primary interest. It was not until 1979 that coping strategies became a focus of the stress research. Ironically, although discussions of stress imply a concern about its impact on health, there was only one dissertation which focused specifically on the theme of health and that study was completed in 1980. It has been speculated by Cherniss (1980) that the growing concern with stress in areas of research reflects societies growing pressures and demands. The dissertation literature on stress in educational administration certainly reflects this growth of concern in the past few years.

Table II examines the distribution of dissertations by the subjects that were studied; the majority of the studies examined principals only, or principals in combination with other administrators. The principal is viewed as the classic middle manager caught between subordinates and superordinates with conflicting expectations. Principals also provide the largest number of administrators for a population to be sampled.

TABLE I
DISTRIBUTION OF DISSERTATIONS BY THEME OVER TIME

Theme	Year Completed													
	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Definition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Causes	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	2	3	2	12	6	4
Measurement	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Coping Strategy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	3	4	15	7	6

TABLE II

DISTRIBUTION OF ALL DISSERTATIONS BY SUBJECTS STUDIED

Subjects	Number of Dissertations
Graduate students only	6
Principals only	20
Asst. Principals only	2
University Administrators only	3
Superintendents only	2
Central Office Administrators only	1
Principals and Asst. Principals	1
Superintendents and Principals	3
Principals and Central Office Administrators	1
Superintendents, Principals, and Central Office Administrators	2
Superintendents, Principals, Asst. Principals, Department Heads, and other Central Office Administrators	3
Total	44

Table III examines the distribution of dissertations by organizational type. The majority of dissertations analyzed administrators in K - 12 programs.

The frequency of themes identified in the dissertation research is detailed in Table IV. Within these themes, the dissertations addressed 35 different variables; each dissertation focused on an average of 6.36 variables.

Research Design

As can be seen in Tables V and VI the majority of the studies are correlational research using the survey to gather data; the studies indicate a lack of diversity in research design. Stress is a multi-dimensional construct demanding a multi-dimensional approach to the research and, at the very least, examining interactions. Correlational studies do not necessarily identify cause and effect relationships; this limitation of the dissertations is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the most prominent number of dissertations addressed the theme of 'causes'.

Statistical Analysis

The greatest number of studies utilized descriptive statistics, and the absence of multivariate statistics is noticeable. The single most prevalent inadequacy in the statistical analyses was failure to test for practical significance when tests of significance were done.

Sampling

Sampling was consistently the aspect of the research which was the poorest. Convenience samples were the rule rather than the exception, and it was extremely difficult to assess

TABLE III

DISTRIBUTION OF ALL DISSERTATIONS BY ORGANIZATIONAL TYPE

Organizational Type	Number of Dissertations
Graduate Students only	6
University Level Administrators	3
Grades K-6	8
Grades 7-9	1
Grades 8-12	6
Grades K-12	20
Total	44

TABLE IV

FREQUENCY OF THEMES IN DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Theme	Number of studies Primary focus*	% of all studies Primary focus	Number of studies Secondary focus	% of all studies Secondary focus
THEORY OF STRESS				
Definition	0	0	0	0
Causes	34	77	1	3
Measurement	3	7	23	62
COPING STRATEGIES	6	14	7	19
IMPACT ON HEALTH	1	2	6	16
Total	44	100	37	100

* 7 studies included here investigated all categories with the exception of definition. A primary focus was determined for each of these studies. These 7 studies represent 16% of the dissertation research.

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TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF DISSERTATIONS BY RESEARCH STRATEGY

Research Strategy	Number of Dissertations	% of Dissertations
Historical	0	0
Descriptive	3	7
Developmental	0	0
Case and Field	0	0
Correlational	37	84
Causal-Comparative	1	2
Experimental	2	5
Quasi-experimental	1	2
Total	44	100

TABLE VI
DISTRIBUTION OF DISSERTATIONS BY DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Data Collection Method	Number of Dissertations	% of Dissertations
Archival	0	0
Survey-Mail	36	82
Survey-Person-to-Person	4 (5a)	9
Survey-Telephone	0	0
Interview	3*	7
Observation	0	0
Unobtrusive	0	0
Physiological	1 (3b)	2
Total	44	100

a Dissertations in this category used a survey of some kind in addition to the other strategy listed.

b Dissertations in this category used the person-to-person survey in addition to some other strategy.

whether the sample was representative of the population. In addition to using convenience samples, most dissertations did not discuss the limitations of the sampling procedure such as sampling bias or volunteer vs. non-volunteer subjects.

Instrument

In many dissertations the instrument for the survey was selected on the basis of availability rather than its usefulness to the solution of the problem. Where questionnaires were self-devised, adequate control was not utilized to test the instrument on a pilot population, or discuss the validity or reliability of the instrument.

Table VII summarizes the mean scores of dissertations by each aspect of the study and includes standard deviations for each aspect of the study as well as the range of values. Generally, the quality of the research is not high and contributes little to theory on stress or educational administration. No effort is made in the dissertation literature to contribute to a definition of stress. This analysis made it very apparent that researchers in the area of stress are not speaking a common language. In the review of the literature, twenty seven dissertations made mention of the difficulty in defining stress or finding some congruence among stress researchers. Yet, the dissertations examined contribute little toward that end.

Relationships Between Theme and Quality

To best examine the existence of relationships between the themes identified and the quality of the research designs, the

TABLE VII

QUALITY OF RESEARCH SCORES

Aspect of the Dissertation	Total Possible Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Range Low	Range High
Presentation of the Problem	18	13.18	2.77	9	18
Review of the Literature	18	11.27	2.33	6	16
Sampling	18	10.30	4.62	7	18
Instrument	18	10.75	4.38	7	17
Statistical Analysis	12	8.84	4.50	5	11
Research Design and Implementation	15	9.80	2.95	6	15
Conclusions	9	6.88	1.45	4	9
Contribution to the Literature	2	.61	.64	0	2
Totals	110	75.43	9.70	55	96

dissertations were grouped by theme. Table VIII presents the total means by theme as well as standard deviations. It immediately becomes apparent that an overwhelming proportion of dissertations belong within the theme of 'causes'. The disproportionate distribution of dissertations by theme makes any relevant discussion of relationship between theme and quality of design inconsequential.

In an effort to detect any relationship between the year of the study and the quality of the research, dissertations were grouped by year of the study. As can be gleaned from Table IX, this effort also proved fruitless in uncovering any significant relationships. Current strategies for research synthesis recommend analyzing studies for significant relationships based on research strategy or data collection methods. However, because of the obvious uniformity of the research strategy and data collection methods in this review, this further analysis was abandoned.

Overall Findings of the Synthesis

The synthesis of dissertations was organized by theme, and consistent trends were identified. The bulk of the dissertations on stress focused primarily on the causes of stress. To facilitate the integration of the material, the studies were grouped according to the type of stress being measured. Four types of stress measures became manifest: physiological measures of stress, psychological measure of stress, organizational measures (relating to the overall organization) and job specific measures (relating to tasks of the administrator).

TABLE VIII

QUALITY OF RESEARCH BY THEME

Theme	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Dissertations
Definition	--	--	0
Measurement	77.33	4.03	3
Causes	75.73	9.67	34
Coping Strategy	69.66	7.71	6
Impact on Health	94.00	0	1
Total	75.43	9.70	44

TABLE IX

QUALITY OF RESEARCH BY YEAR OF STUDY

Year of	Mean	Standard Deviations	Number of Dissertations
1969	75.00	0	1
1970-74	--	--	0
1975	76.67	2.05	3
1976	79.67	6.80	3
1977	87.00	2.00	2
1978	73.00	9.20	3
1979	77.00	7.07	4
1980	74.33	12.62	15
1981	76.00	8.14	7
1982	71.17	5.70	6
Total	75.43	9.70	44

Table X presents the distribution of dissertations which focus on causes according to type of stress measure. The sparsity of studies using physiological measures reflects the difficulty involved in contriving situations in the educational setting where physiological measures can be utilized.

A cursory glance at Table X might lead the reader to presume an ease of integration of these studies utilizing meta-analysis. The uniformity of studies ceases with the surface categorization; even studies which purport to be utilizing the same or similar instruments present only an illusion of similarity. An in-depth examination of these studies reveals that some aspect of the measurement is unique. For example, three dissertations measure stress in terms of anxiety. However, one dissertation seeks correlations between anxiety and job satisfaction; one seeks correlations between anxiety and stressful life events; the third considers anxiety the actual measure of the level of stress and seeks correlations between anxiety and various demographics. The diversity of the definitions of terms and constructs precluded the application of the desirable meta-analysis of these studies.

The following trends do emerge:

(1) Subjects with no experience will experience more stress than subjects with any experience in an educational setting.

(2) Contrived situations do not produce significant levels of stress as measured by physiological techniques.

TABLE X

DISTRIBUTION OF DISSERTATIONS ON CAUSES
BY TYPE OF STRESS MEASURES

Physiological	Psychological	Organizational	Job Specific
Dale, 1976	Domian, 1980	Gilbert, 1981	Barber, 1982
	Everson, 1975	King, 1979	Cook, 1980
	Friday, 1980	Lemley, 1980	Gall, 1982
	Gunnings, 1981	Lynn, 1978	Hughes, 1981
	Harris, 1978	Magill, 1976	Lawson, G., 1980
	Howard, 1979	Reife, 1980	Marshall, 1980
	Larson, 1977		Milligan, 1982
	Lawson, L., 1980		Mills, 1981
	Libby, 1977		Mundle, 1980
	Murphy, 1982		Robinson-Lewis,1981
	Peterson,1976		Steckman, 1981
	Purvis, 1975		Swent, 1978
	Schuetz, 1980		
	Warner, 1980		
1	15	6	12

(3) Administrators generally have a high degree of job satisfaction.

(4) There is no relation between stress and job satisfaction.

(5) Higher levels of anxiety do relate to higher levels of stress.

(6) The administrators comprising the subjects of these studies generally experienced low to moderate levels of job related stress.

(7) Stress of outside events or factors such as personal finance or security are related to levels of anxiety, but not to job satisfaction.

(8) Stressors of personal lives are more significant than the organizational factors.

(9) Work overload and the time pressures it implies are significant stressors for administrators.

(10) Leadership style has no relation to levels of personal or organizational stress; however, the leaders who implement a variety of styles of leadership and coping strategies can reduce their own levels of stress.

(11) Higher levels of organizational stress predict lower levels of organizational innovativeness.

(12) Administrative constraints such as too many meetings, too much clerical work, interruptions by telephone calls, heavy workload, and compliance with federal, state and local regulations overwhelmingly were the most prevalent causes of stress in administrators.

(13) Though administrators perceive that more than 70% of the stress in their lives is job related, generally, administrators do not suffer from critical levels of stress.

(14) Higher levels of stress do indicate the presence of increased health problems.

(15) At this point in the research there appears to be no relation between levels of stress and the number of coping strategies utilized.

(16) Alcohol and medication are generally not accepted as coping strategies among administrators.

(17) Hobbies, sports, or exercise and interpersonal relations are the most frequent coping strategies utilized by administrators.

(18) The following variables have no relation to levels of stress: educational level of attainment, marital status, number of people supervised, salary, or socioeconomic status of student body.

(19) Superintendents suffer from higher levels of stress than other administrators; secondary school administrators frequently have higher levels of stress than elementary school administrators.

(20) As administrators work more hours per week, their levels of stress increase.

(21) As the number of dependents within one's responsibility increases, personal stress or anxiety increases.

(22) The following variables do have a relation to levels of stress: age, experience, race, sex, and the size of the school supervised. Further research is needed to clarify the relationships.

Discussion

Researchers in the area of stress are not speaking a common language. The illusion of similarity only goes as far as the rubric of stress. Stress research has been in its infancy, but the time has come to shatter the illusion and create a veritable theory of stress based upon a common language and shared data bases of support. Kerlinger reminds us that "the researcher can get so involved in the fascinating business of examining complex human attributes and activities that he may find it difficult to focus his mind on the theory he is trying to develop and to test" (1973, p.407). This seems to be what has occurred in stress research in educational administration.

Dissertations on stress in educational administration should be able to contribute to administration theory as well as stress theory. Yet, the dissertations examined contribute little to

either. In seeking to understand stress, researchers have lost sight of our own knowledge of organizational theory. Studies which have attempted to find a link between stress and organizational theory have not been successful. Perhaps, they have not looked in the right directions, yet.

The dissertations have contributed information on the administrator in the school setting; this research which focused on job specific settings has been necessary. However, there have been enough of this type of exploratory study. Researchers in the area of stress in educational administration have reported significant variables and sought relationships between those variables. The content analysis of the themes which have been studied in the dissertations makes it obvious that too many dissertations have tried to do too many things. Nineteen dissertations have investigated three separate themes of research; of those nineteen, nine have investigated four of the themes identified for the purposes of this research. The problem is not that there is such great overlap in the nature of stress research. The problem is that that dissertations have tried to cover all aspects of stress research, and in so doing, have contributed little to the literature.

Researchers in the field of stress in educational administration need to focus on the variables which have indicated consistent significance rather than variables which have been unproductive in previous studies. Researchers in educational administration must move beyond correlational research by survey; there has been no diversity in the design

of research strategies. Stress is a multi-dimensional construct; we need research which is multi-dimensional and, examines interactions. The statistical techniques employed in the dissertations have not kept pace with the wide-spread use of multi-variate analytical techniques; multiple correlation and regression should be helping stress research move toward predictive studies. If we view stress as multi-dimensional, then we must measure stress in more than one dimension; researchers must improve the validity of their surveys by doing random interviewing or using physiological measures as well. In addition, it should be common practice for researchers to randomize their samples and examine nonrespondent biases.

These methodological suggestions should be rather easy to implement. The difficult aspect will be moving the stress research toward a proper perspective.

Toward a Proper Perspective

A trend which emerged repeatedly from the dissertations reviewed is that administrators are not functioning at critical stress levels. They perceive more than 70% of the stress in their lives to be job related, yet, their scores on measures of anxiety, role conflicts, or tasks related to the job of the administrator do not support these perceptions. Does this mean that administrators are not stressed? Should we abandon studies of stress in educational administration? Certainly not. However, we need to change our perspective on that research.

The dissertations unanimously demonstrate that increasing levels of stress cause increases in health problems and incidence of stress-related diseases. At a time when health insurance programs are experiencing sky-rocketing costs, it is in the interest of all society to understand why some of us succomb to illness in stressful times and others do not. Administrators, as a group, are coping very well in these stressful times. In light of declining enrollments, tightening budgets, increasing mandates, and increased parent demands, administrators manage to maintain low to moderate levels of stress. Why? Research is needed to examine how administrators cope with stress; this is a relatively new aspect of the research and it is uncharted territory. Physiological studies have shown that contrived situations do not allow realistic measures of stress levels; dissertations as far back as 1975 have been calling for longitudinal studies. What is needed are longitudinal studies of administrators in their natural work setting, using more than one type of measurement of stress. Examinations of stress-free administrators are needed as well as those who suffer from high levels of stress. Case studies are needed to go below the surface of spurious variables; we need an understanding of stress at its peaks and valleys for the same individual over time. What can we learn from the administrators who, perhaps, have never thought about how they cope? It is not important to know if administrators are the most stressed of all executives. It is important to know that everyone suffers stress at some

time or another; it is important to teach administrators to understand their own responses to stress, to recognize the danger signals, and to teach them how to cope successfully with the stress that is an inevitable portion of their job. The dissertation research on stress in educational administration must move toward that perspective; we cannot yet accomplish these tasks.

This, then, should be the beginning of a new perspective on administrative stress. Before we can go any further in our understanding of stress, we need to develop a common language, definition and theory of stress. Once we have established that theory, we can look toward understanding stress as a part of every person's life, and seek an understanding of the most positive, healthy ways to cope with the inevitable. We need to incorporate this theory of stress into our knowledge of organizations and how they work. This will enable us to go below the surface and contribute to the field of administration as well as to the field of stress.

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Note 1.
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